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# DEFENSE MINISTER RESIGNS IN FRANCE OVER BOAT ATTACK

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Special to The New York Times

PARIS, Sept. 20 — The French Defense Minister resigned today and the head of France's intelligence agency was dismissed as the Government moved to end the political crisis surrounding the sabotage of an anti-nuclear protest ship in New Zealand.

The actions represented a tacit admission by the Government that its agents were responsible for sinking the ship, which belonged to the environmentalist group Greenpeace, and that the facts of French complicity had been withheld from Government investigators.

## Longtime Mitterrand Associate

Press reports have linked the two officials to complicity in the bombing of the vessel, the Rainbow Warrior. Both denied responsibility for the sinking.

The Defense Minister, Charles Hernu, an associate of President François Mitterrand for nearly 30 years and an architect of the Socialist Government's military modernization program, gave his resignation to Prime Minister Laurent Fabius this morning.

Mr. Fabius then announced, in a letter to Mr. Mitterrand, that the chief of the French intelligence agency, Adm. Pierre Lacoste, had been relieved of his duties.

## 'An Absurd Crime'

Paul Quilès, the Minister of Urban Affairs, Housing and Transportation, was named to replace Mr. Hernu as Defense Minister.

The attack against the Greenpeace vessel, in which a Portuguese photographer was killed, had been condemned by Mr. Mitterrand as an "absurd crime," and Mr. Fabius had vowed that France would punish any-

one found guilty of carrying out the operation.

In his letter to the French President, made public here today, Mr. Fabius said Admiral Lacoste had refused to answer questions from Mr. Hernu, who was ordered on Thursday to step up an investigation into the affair.

"Admiral Lacoste refused to respond to the Defense Minister, invoking his conception of his duty," Mr. Fabius said. "It is obviously impossible to accept such a situation. I propose to you to immediately remove Admiral Lacoste from his functions."

"In addition," Mr. Fabius wrote, "this morning I received the Defense Minister. Mr. Hernu, who has always shown a high sense of his function, judged that he should offer his resignation. I propose that you accept it."

"It is clear," the letter concluded, "that this affair should not shake the confidence that the nation and the Government has in the French Army."

In his letter of resignation, Mr. Hernu said that in stepping down he was taking responsibility for the failure of subordinates to disclose the truth about the Rainbow Warrior affair.

## 'This I Cannot Allow'

"I have known since since last night that authorities within my ministry have without doubt concealed the truth from me," Mr. Hernu said. "This I cannot allow."

The Rainbow Warrior was sunk in Auckland Harbor on July 10 when two

bombs, attached to its hull, exploded. The vessel was to lead a protest against French nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Within days, two French agents were arrested by the New Zealand police and charged with murder and arson.

Admiral Lacoste's dismissal and Mr. Hernu's resignation signaled an effort by Mr. Mitterrand to respond to growing skepticism over official explanations of the affair and the appearance of a cover-up by senior officials.

## Mitterrand Not Implicated

The President himself has not been accused of wrongdoing. Press accounts indicate that he first learned of French involvement on July 18, more than a week after the sinking.

On Thursday, Mr. Mitterrand wrote to Mr. Fabius that the "competent services," meaning the intelligence agency, had failed to respond convincingly to press reports that provided details of the operation in New Zealand. He told Mr. Fabius to "proceed immediately to changes in the personnel" of the agency.

The political crisis surrounding the Greenpeace affair has been growing since Tuesday, when Le Monde, the authoritative daily, said Mr. Hernu and senior military subordinates had planned the operation and had entrusted it to the intelligence agency under Admiral Lacoste.

The operation, Le Monde said, involved three teams of French agents, most of them attached to an underwater training center on Corsica. The newspaper said two navy frogmen had fixed the bombs to the hull of the Rainbow Warrior and left New Zealand undetected the next day.